

Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06

March 14, 2013

In favor of HB-6519 and HB-6527

Members of the Committee,

My name is Doug Rankin. I'm speaking today with the anger of a parent, and as someone who worked in the pharmaceutical industry, and witnessed the fallout of drugs gone wild. Both of these hats make it clear to me that we all should want to know if there are GMO ingredients in our food. When my father was born, in Nebraska in 1918, food was food. Your only concern then was having enough of it on your table. Now, 90 years later, we're in a parallel position: while there is the illusion of plenty, there is actually a scarcity of real food when you factor out the 80 percent of the food supply in the U.S. which is contaminated with GMO ingredients. The first step to help all of us shop for the foods we want are labels. If the label says, "made with GMO ingredients", then I am an informed citizen who can make the choices I need to make. I could tell when I was five that cigarettes were deadly, but we label cigarettes anyway. We list cholesterol and saturated fat and sugar. And loads of chemicals and food colors and ingredients we've never heard of and cannot pronounce. And of course we must label GMOs.

In a rational world, the makers of GMO producers would have to convince us that their laboratory creations are safe for human and environmental health. Instead, they have been granted entry into the U.S. food supply via a bureaucratic maneuver, with little regulatory oversight and even less safety data. The burden is somehow on me to not only ponder their safety, but to do all the research to buy the foods I want to buy.

I already learned to be wary of products deemed to be safe. My first job in the pharmaceutical industry was in sales in 1997, when we launched a powerful new antibiotic, touted as a wonder drug because it could kill types of bacteria that other antibiotics in its class could not. The FDA gave it more approved indications for treatment than any new drug I was aware of. It was approved to treat even mild infections like uncomplicated urinary tract infections. That was surprising for such a powerful drug, but since we got paid on sales, we rationalized that the regulators and the company were acting with all due caution.

Shortly after I remember my father, a physician here at Hartford Hospital, reading over the package insert for this new wonder drug and telling me we should never be selling a drug this powerful in the kind of volume we expected, and never as the first or second line choice for most of the infections it was indicated to treat. In short, he told me this was a drug he would rarely ever use, and almost never in the first several years until meaningful data could be accumulated, data which is really only available once a drug reaches the broad market.

I suggested that he was being far too conservative. Dad, I argued, the company spent hundreds of millions in clinical trials to make sure this drug worked as advertised, and was safe as indicated. He was unimpressed. Four years later the drug that was expected to deliver shareholders a billion dollars in profit per year was withdrawn from the U.S. market due to very serious liver issues, and a host of adverse events. All this happened under the nose of so much expertise and regulation. Makes you think.

What it makes me think is that rarely does industry see the big picture when they are accountable to shareholders and earnings reports. What it makes me think is rarely is something done for the right reason and for the good of the citizen. Not without a fight. And so we are here today to make our voices heard. Polling consistently shows that the majority of American citizens support the labeling of GMO foods, and a growing contingent of thousands right here in Connecticut is telling you that we want, and have the right, to have GMO ingredients in our food labeled. It's inevitable, so be on the right side of history. Please approve HB-6519, An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food, and HB-6527, An Act Concerning Genetically Engineered Baby Food. Connecticut's motto these days is Still Revolutionary. Let's be the first to signal that the time for labeling is here.

With conviction,

Doug Rankin
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